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Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues

1988–89 Annual Report

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues was established in November 1986 to advise, report to, conduct research for, and make recommendations to the Alberta Government on matters relating to women.

The Council consists of a full-time chairperson and 14 members who represent Alberta women of various geographic, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. The chairperson and Council members are appointed by Executive Committee and the Council reports to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta through the **Honourable Elaine McCoy**, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

Members of the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues during the 1988-89 fiscal year were the following:

Margaret Leahey, Chairperson	Edmonton
Lori Andreachuk	Lethbridge
Wendy Church	Red Deer
Olga Cyfurik	Edmonton
Kathryn Habberfield	Langdon
Brigit Hawkins	Spruce Grove
Nancy Louis	Hobbema
Eva Mertick	Calgary
Lucy Milne	Medicine Hat
Dr. Pam Sidhu	Calgary
Deanna Sidoruk	Grimshaw
Janet Slaughter	Fort McMurray
Hazel Smith	Bowden
Bernadette Swan	Edmonton
Leah Waters	Lethbridge

During 1988-89 the Council made a total of 28 recommendations dealing with immigrant and visible minority women, native education, the Widows' Pension Program and the Maintenance Enforcement Program. A summary of these recommendations is included in this report.

The chairperson and Council members also had the opportunity to visit, meet and speak to a number of groups including: South Edmonton Rotary Club; Girl Guides of Canada; Women's WIN House, Edmonton; Planned Parenthood, Edmonton; St. Francis Xavier High School, Edmonton; Delta Kappa Gamma, Calgary; the Alberta Association for Young Children; the Immigrant Women's Network; the YWCA Calgary Women of Distinction banquet; Professional Secretaries International, Edmonton; Alberta Recreation and Parks; the Edmonton Local Council of Women; the Peace Country Crisis Association; the Calgary YWCA Social Issues Committee and the Rocky Mountain House Women's Conference.

The Council released two discussion papers dealing with midwifery in Alberta and new reproductive technologies, held a public meeting in Edmonton and sponsored a symposium on family, health, law and work at the Edmonton Convention Centre.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were presented to the Alberta Government by the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues during 1988-89.

Immigrant and Visible Minority Women

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government, through the Minister of Career Development and Employment, the Honourable Rick Orman, address the following concerns with the federal government through the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Honourable Barbara McDougall:

That new immigrants to Canada be informed before they leave their homeland on:

A) The social, economic, cultural, and political climate in Canada. This information should include, in particular, the status of employment opportunities and educational qualifications.

B) Their need to adjust to the Canadian environment and lifestyle (which in many cases is completely different from that with which they are familiar).

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government, through the Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism, the Honourable Greg Stevens, place increased emphasis on developing and providing programs that promote the benefits and rewards of multiculturalism in Alberta's society in order to create a better understanding and acceptance of immigrants within our province, regardless of their color, race or creed.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues strongly believes that with universally accessible English as a Second Language training programs, immigrants to Alberta will be in a better position to more fully participate in Alberta society.

Therefore, to maintain and ensure accessible and quality ESL programs, the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government address funding cutbacks to existing English as a Second Language training programs with the federal government and if the federal government does not act, that the province take the initiative and consider providing additional provincial funding to maintain and improve ESL programs, including those which are community based.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that English as a Second Language training, currently 40 weeks in duration, be extended to 52 weeks.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that full-time English language training be offered in a more flexible manner than the current structured programming. The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that an additional program be offered in full-time ESL training consisting of formal classroom education and a workplace experience component.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more flexible part-time ESL classes be made available, ideally in community-based centres. Class hours should be more flexible to accommodate shift workers and homemakers.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the provincial government, through the departments of Career Development and Employment and Advanced Education, extend the mandate of existing career centres to facilitate use by the immigrant community, educational institutions, professional and occupational bodies, employment and career counsellors and government departments seeking education equivalency information.

These centres would be available to provide immigrants with information and counselling services to assist them in making decisions on how to pursue careers in their chosen fields or how to choose acceptable alternatives, based on their prior education.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that programs be specifically developed for immigrant women with input from the federal and provincial governments and immigrant women's organizations. These programs must encompass skill training appropriate to all skill levels.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues also believes that with more comprehensive counselling many women would have the opportunity to make responsible, well-informed job training decisions.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more comprehensive counselling be provided specifically for immigrant women in regards to need and interest. This counselling must be through the provincial government, not through private businesses, and it must be mandatory before entry into any training or retraining program.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that immigrant women be encouraged to enter more non-traditional training areas and that the Alberta government establish a provincial apprenticeship program specifically geared to meet the employment needs of immigrant and visible minority women of Alberta.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that more training materials be developed for immigrant women to educate the women about the cycle of violence, the purpose of shelters, and recourse available to them. These multi-language training materials should be in the form of audio and video cassettes and written materials.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that additional funds be allocated to the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence to develop these training materials in conjunction with immigrant women's organizations and the provincial shelters.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that immigrant aid and cultural organizations be able to distribute information materials to combat lack of knowledge and information on family violence and the role of shelters in their cultural communities.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that cross-cultural training between immigrant aid and women's organizations and shelters be co-ordinated by the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence with the support of shelters and immigrant organizations.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues shares the funding concerns of the province's shelters and recommends that adequate funding to meet the operations and objectives of the shelters be provided by the provincial government.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that funds be provided for linguistic support to the shelters.

Native Education

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues supports the native education policy as adopted by the Alberta Education Minister and recommends that funding for the continuing implementation of the native education policy be adequate and increased if necessary to meet the objectives of school boards in fulfilling the government policy.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues commends the government for the excellent texts being developed through the native education policy. In an effort to promote education and awareness within Alberta's native and non-native population, the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the native education policy texts be supplied by the Alberta government to all educational and related institutions throughout the province.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that a realistic and specific student/liaison officer ratio be established and that adequate funds be allocated to school boards for liaison officers' salaries.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that these liaison officers be given specific written responsibilities, to include but not be limited to:

1. Familiarizing native students with the school environment.
2. Serving as student advocates to protect and promote the well-being of native students.
3. Serving as aides to teachers in regard to the academic or social conduct of native students.
4. Serving as sources for school parent advisory boards in conducting independent research in their capacity as monitors of the school system.
5. Seeking and offering native students, starting at the junior high level, opportunities and encouragement to participate in training programs, when the students have finished their formal schooling, in the areas of native culture, counselling and teaching.
6. Seeking out native communities to participate in events for native and non-native students alike.
7. Having the right to examine textbooks in their individual schools and make recommendations to the school advisory boards about native content.
8. Reporting to the school advisory boards as well as to the school administration or school board.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that additional programs be developed to encourage the production and distribution of culture-specific materials in support of curriculum-based and community-based alcohol and drug abuse prevention activities for native youth.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the department of Advanced Education develop a project similar to the Native Education project to solicit opinions from the native communities on the services desired.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that Advanced Education utilize liaison officers to help bridge the gap between high school and further training, and that in their work these officers place specific emphasis on students from the outlying reserves or communities to help them cope with cultural adjustments and program requirements.

Widow's Pension

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that the Widow's Pension Act be repealed and replaced with legislation which recognizes as a principle the needs of individuals between the ages of 55 and 64 who demonstrate serious financial need regardless of marital status and who do not receive benefits such as those received by Alberta seniors under the Alberta Assured Income Plan or the Federal Old Age Security Plan.

Maintenance Enforcement Program (MEP)

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends to the Province of Alberta that steps be taken to provide immediate payment to claimants, thereby eliminating the 10-day hold on cheques. It is the recommendation of the Council that an automatic Debit system be implemented and/or a Fund be created in order that the offices of MEP might advance cheques to Creditors in advance of the present 10-day clearing period required for Debtors' cheques.

Rationale: The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues is of the view that if such a Fund or automatic Debit system were established, the benefits of a more efficient system and Creditors receiving cheques promptly will be to the advantage of individual Creditors and also to the advantage of the MEP systems as more immediate reporting of delinquency would be created.

The Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues recommends that a policy be implemented at MEP to provide for the dissemination of information regarding individual claims via the present MEP toll free telephone number. It is recommended that in order to protect confidentiality, an individual MEP identification number be given to the Claimant and provided to MEP offices before information would be released to the Claimant.

Rationale: It is felt by this Council that such a system would alleviate many of the concerns of Claimants who simply feel that they do not have sufficient information. Also, the use of telephone information dissemination will assist MEP in its collection efforts, as Creditors often receive information regarding Debtors which they may be hesitant to forward in writing to MEP.

It is recommended that MEP develop an explanation code to insert on all cheques disseminated to Creditors to assist them in understanding the basis of any payment received by them.

It is recommended by the Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues that in the event a stay is requested pursuant to the Maintenance Enforcement Act, ongoing payments be required to be made for the period to MEP of the application to vary.

ISSN 0842-4809
ACW 588-6-90